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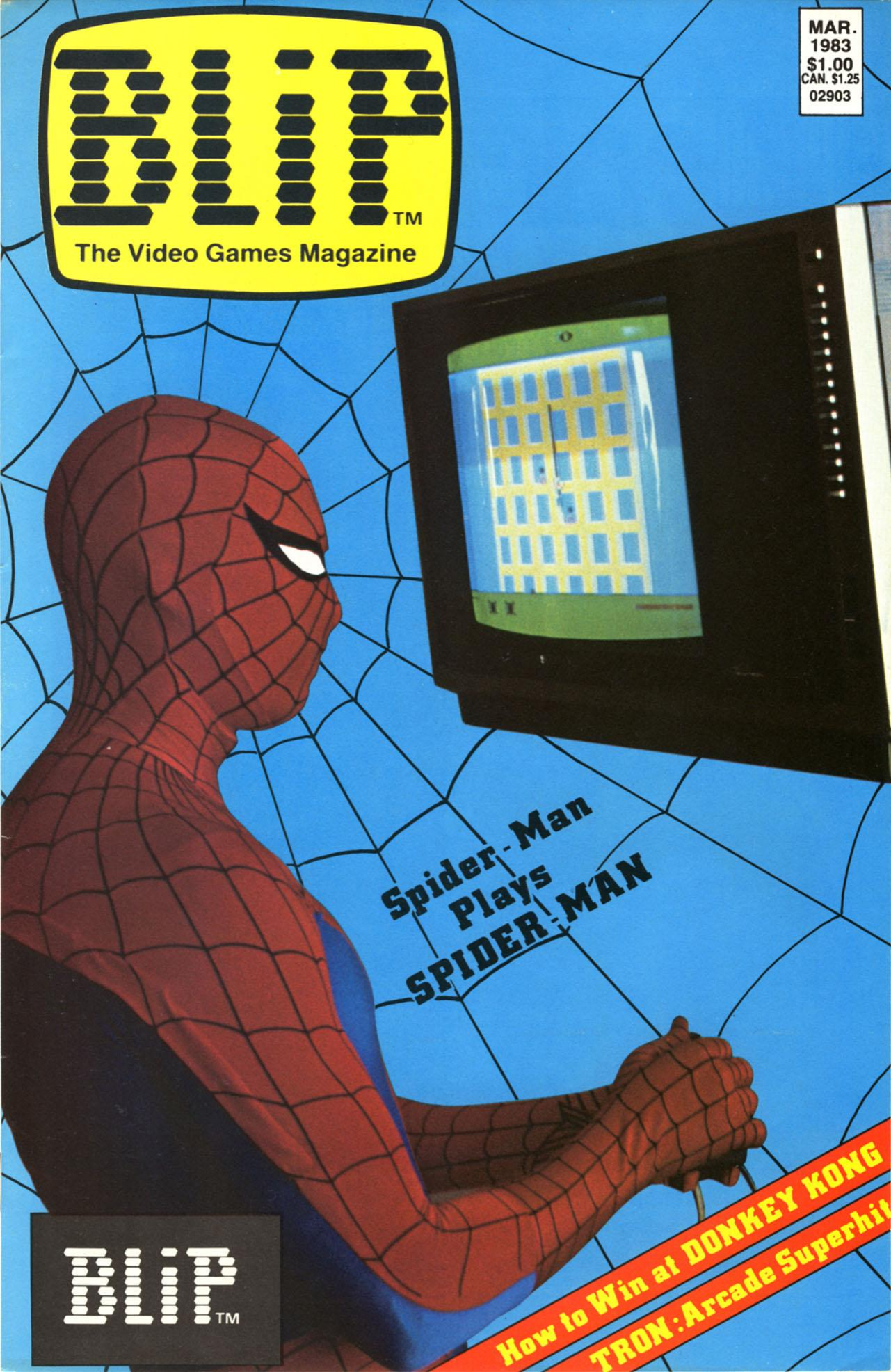
The Video Games Magazine



Spider-Man Plays SPIDER-MAN

How to Win at DONKEY KONG

TRON: Arcade Superhit

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BLIP

The Video Games Magazine

If you have any questions about video games or computers, write them down and send them to us. If there are things you want to read about in BLIP, get a letter off to us right away. Or maybe you just want to tell us what you think of the magazine.

We won't be able to print every letter we receive, but we will read them all. And we'll print the ones we think most readers would be interested in. Here's the address:

BLIP Letters
Marvel Comics Group
387 Park Avenue South
New York, N.Y. 10016

BLIP
Volume I, No. 2
March, 1983

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Spider-Man Plays SPIDER-MAN™!

The famous arch-enemies get ready to compete via the TV screen.

At the Marvel Animation Studios in Hollywood, a friendly secretary led us into Stan Lee's office and asked us to wait. We stood there, surrounded by mementoes of Stan's most famous creation.

There were Spider-Man comics, Spider-Man paperback books, photos of Spider-Man, and awards given to the superhero and his creator. A script on the desk told us that Stan was considering a movie starring Spidey.

All this made us feel very comfortable, because we were there to talk to Stan about the world-famous superhero who dominated his office. We had come to Hollywood to ask for help in announcing Spider-Man's latest conquest—the world of video games.

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Jeremie Waterman takes his turn at the game, while Nicky Bravin (left) *and Damon Liebowitz wait patiently.*

"Introduce the new SPIDER-MAN cartridge?" Stan said gleefully. "Of couse I'll help you!"

He warned us that he wasn't very good at video games. "But then," he added, "I sometimes think you have to be 19 or younger to really master those games. And I passed 19 at least two years ago."

We decided not to comment on his arithmetic and asked instead if he'd be willing to enter a friendly video game competition.

"Who would be my opponent?" he asked.

"Spider-Man," we told him.

He threw his head back and laughed uproariously. "You want me to play the SPIDER-MAN game against Spidey himself? What a great idea!"

He thought for a few seconds, then added, "But only on one condition."

"What's that?" we asked suspiciously.

To our great relief, he said, "Only if we can get some kids to join us.

Stan Lee tries his hand, with Spidey cheering for him, the Goblin against him.

Spider-Man thoughtfully covers the Goblin's eyes, to keep him from seeing himself destroyed on the screen.

Spider-Man holds Danny Hinden up to watch Melinda Moore defuse the super-bomb. She's getting encouragement from Teddy Tenenbaum, who was the first player to reach the fourth level of difficulty in the game.

Dean Bochner studies the screen as Rob Sassen runs up the highest score of the day.

Grownups shouldn't play video games without kids."

That sounded right to us. So we told Stan we'd see him on Saturday morning, and we went and made arrangements for a party at his house.

On Saturday, we showed up with Spider-Man, 14 kids, and one surprise for Stan. The surprise was the Green Goblin. Since he's also a character in the new video game, Spidey had insisted that he be invited to join us.

The SPIDER-MAN game comes from Parker Bros., who've already scored big in the video game field with FROGGER and THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK. In their new game, Spider-Man uses his web fluid to climb a tall building where a gang of criminals are hiding out.

Near the top of the building, he has to defuse a series of bombs in order to reach the super-bomb at the very top. The superbomb is protected by the leader of the gang, the

Tim Measures goes at it very seriously, with Alana Ross and Rob Sassen looking on.

Jeremie Waterman takes another turn, with Billy Kuvula next to him. Behind them (left to right), Kathy Nishida, Brandy Litwin, and Mark Pressman look on.

Green Goblin himself. Spidey has to outwit the Goblin and swing across the super-bomb to defuse it.

We started to explain all this to our 14 guests, but it turned out to be unnecessary. They were itching to get to the game and figure it out for themselves.

So we turned them loose, then watched in awe, as one after another racked up high scores that we couldn't even approach, after hours of playing the game. Stan tried the game several times. So did Spider-Man and the Green Goblin. But not one of them could come close to the scores the kids were hitting.

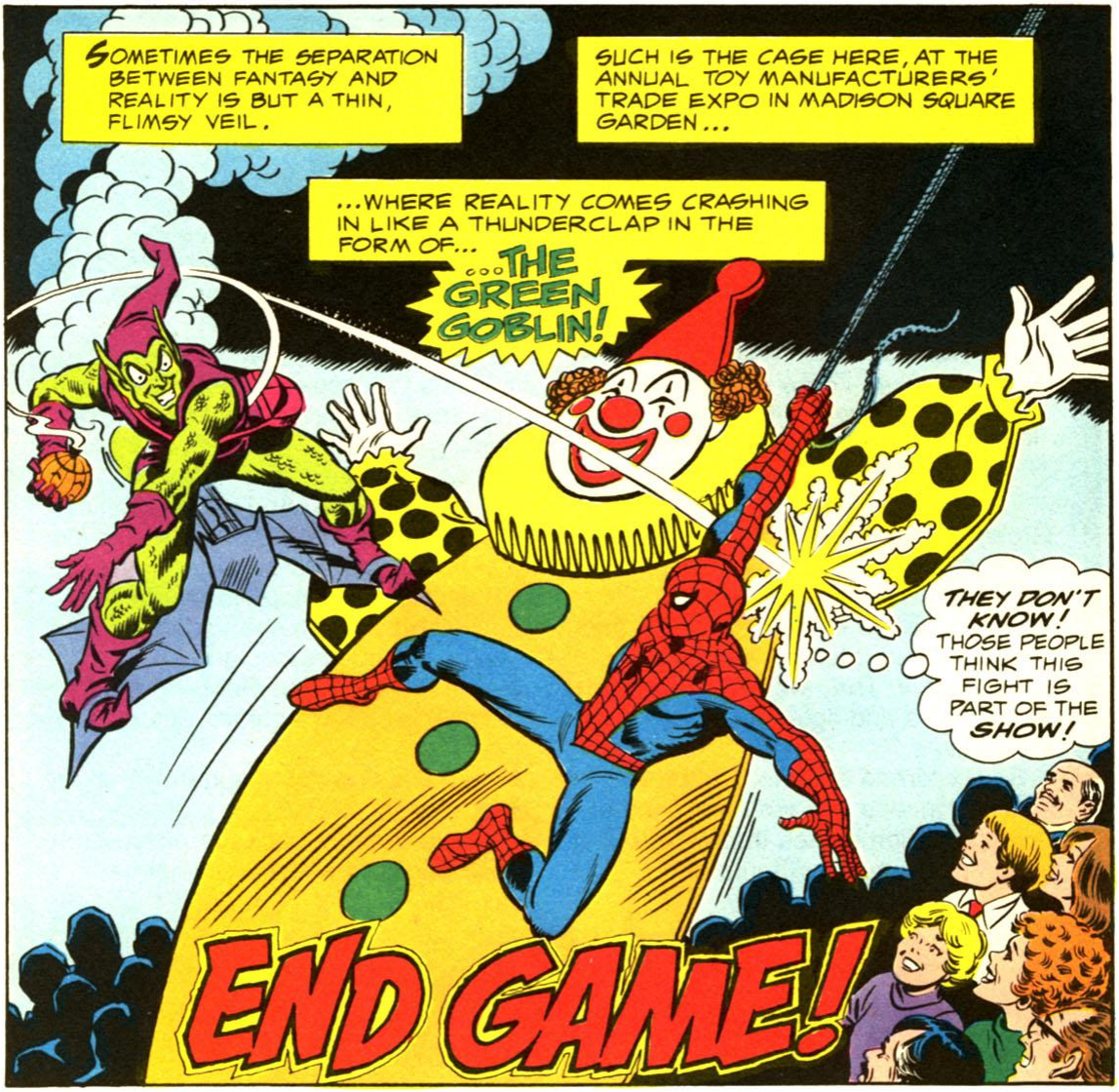
So we did the only smart thing for a grownup to do in the situation. We stopped keeping score. Instead, we all just had fun taking turns at the game.

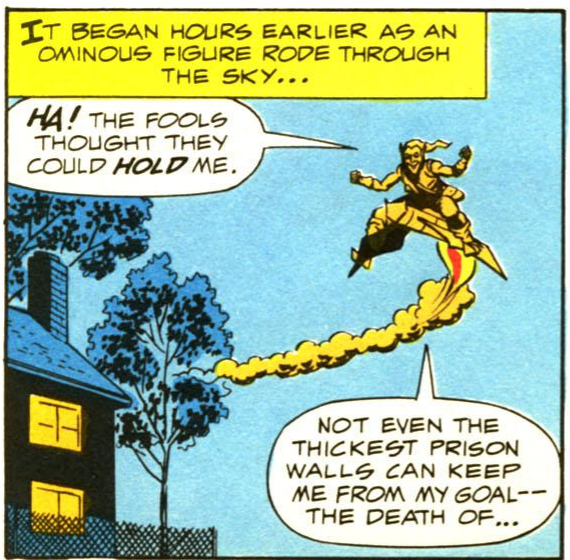
There were a couple of minor incidents that could have led to trouble. The Green Goblin, for instance, kept insisting that he could top Spider-Man's high score, if we'd give him just one more chance. And we had to keep reminding him that no one was paying attention to the scores except him.

Eventually, he stopped competing and just played. He even seemed to be having fun, but we couldn't be sure. Even when the Goblin is happy, everything he says comes out as a growl.

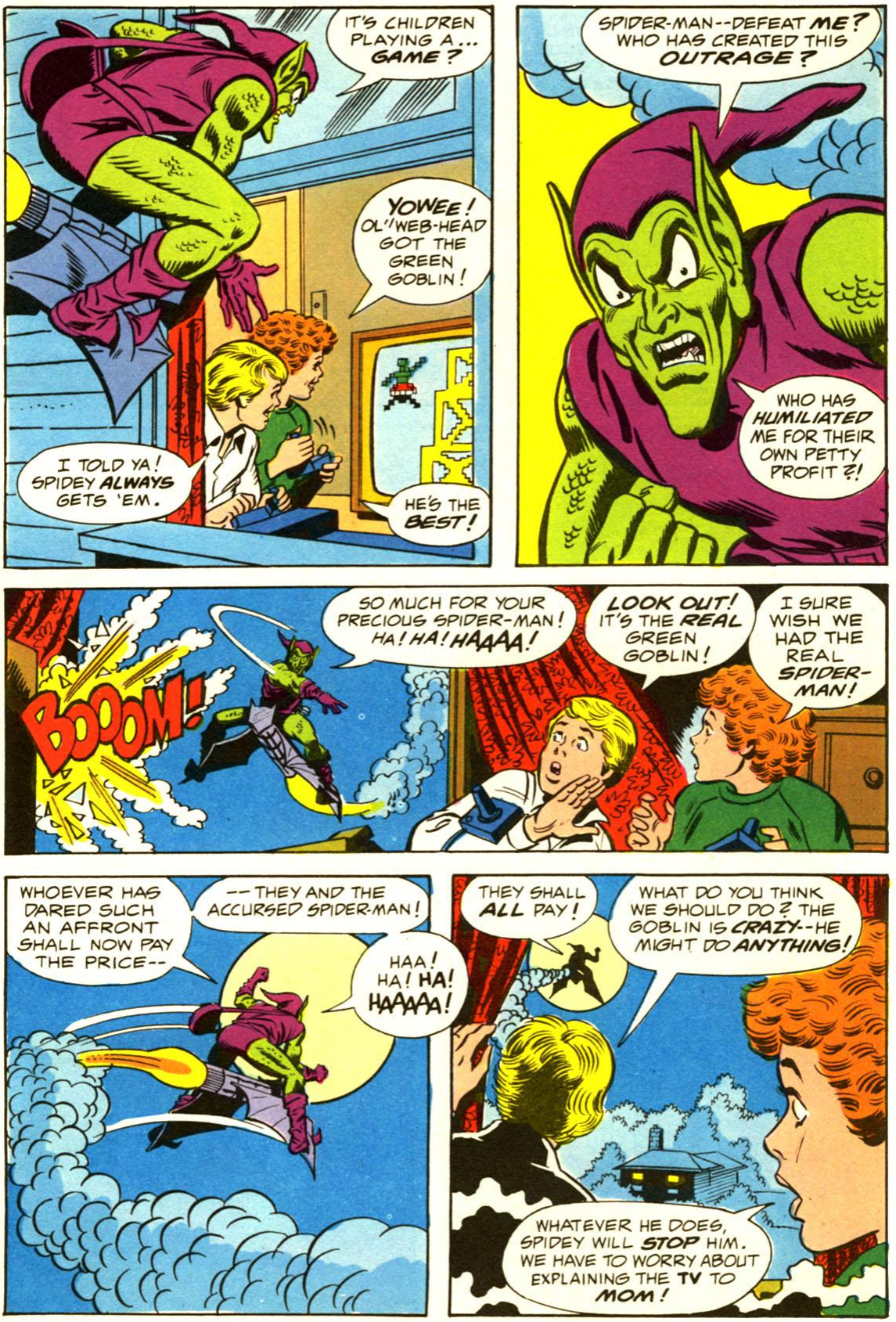
There was no doubt about everybody else, though. We all had a great time. We brought back the pictures on these pages to show you what it was like.

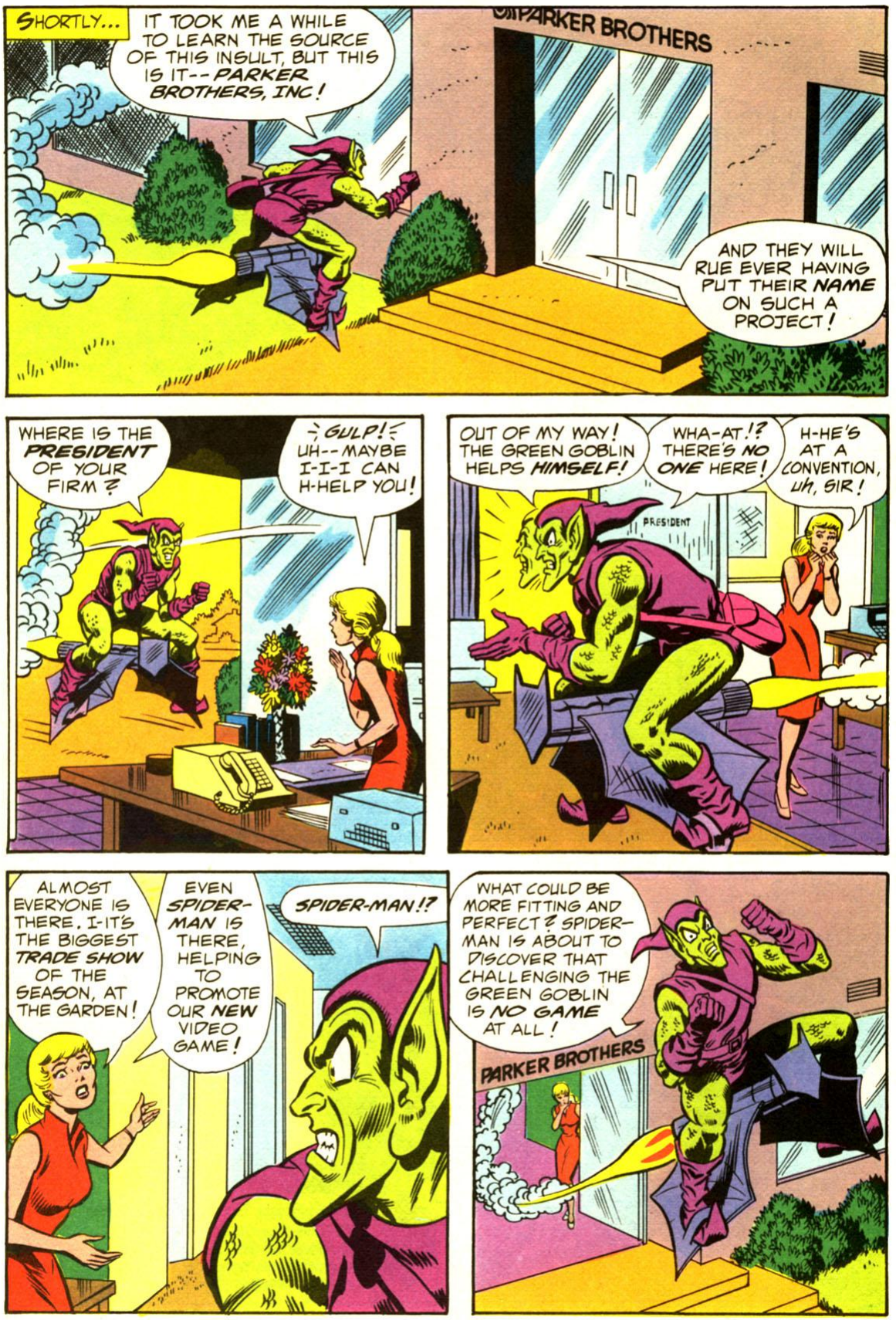
When the party was over, Spider-Man discovered the perfect ending for a terrific day.


SOMETIMES THE SEPARATION BETWEEN FANTASY AND REALITY IS BUT A THIN, FLIMSY VEIL.
SUCH IS THE CASE HERE, AT THE ANNUAL TOY MANUFACTURERS' TRADE EXPO IN MADISON SQUARE GARDEN...
...WHERE REALITY COMES CRASHING IN LIKE A THUNDERCLAP IN THE FORM OF...
THE GREEN GOBLIN!
THEY DON'T KNOW! THOSE PEOPLE THINK THIS FIGHT IS PART OF THE SHOW!
END GAME!


IT BEGAN HOURS EARLIER AS AN OMINOUS FIGURE RODE THROUGH THE SKY...
HA! THE FOOLS THOUGHT THEY COULD HOLD ME.
NOT EVEN THE THICKEST PRISON WALLS CAN KEEP ME FROM MY GOAL-- THE DEATH OF...

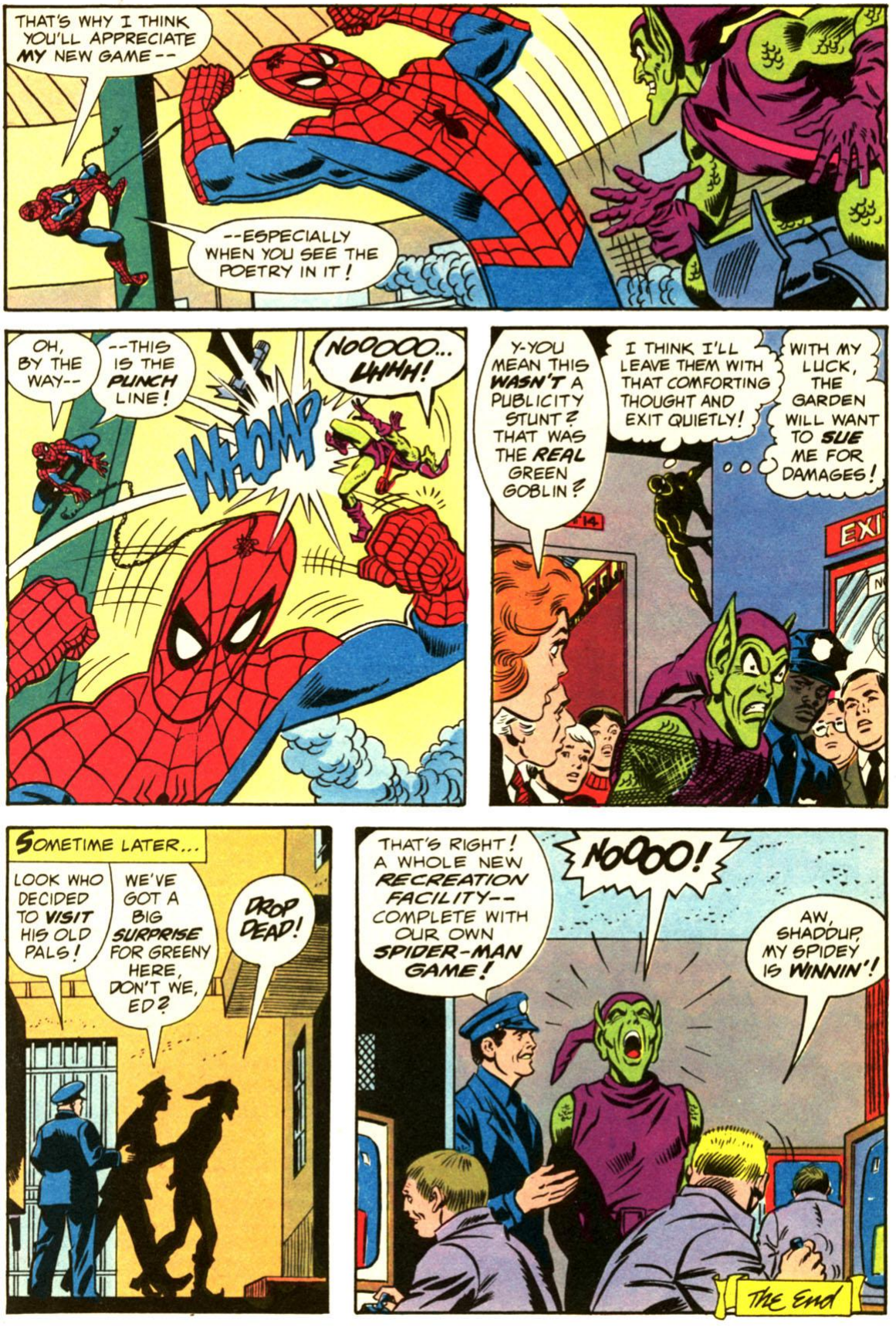
SCRIPT: DAVID KRAFT ART: JOHN ROMITA LETTERS: GASPAR SALADINO COLORS: MARIE SEVERIN


IT'S CHILDREN PLAYING A... GAME?
YOWEE! OL' WEB-HEAD GOT THE GREEN GOBLIN!
I TOLD YA! SPIDEY ALWAYS GETS 'EM.
HE'S THE BEST!
SPIDER-MAN--DEFEAT ME? WHO HAS CREATED THIS OUTRAGE?
WHO HAS HUMILIATED ME FOR THEIR OWN PETTY PROFIT?!
BOOOM!
SO MUCH FOR YOUR PRECIOUS SPIDER-MAN! HA! HA! HAAAA!
LOOK OUT! IT'S THE REAL GREEN GOBLIN!
I SURE WISH WE HAD THE REAL SPIDER-MAN!
WHOEVER HAS DARED SUCH AN AFFRONT SHALL NOW PAY THE PRICE--
--THEY AND THE ACCURSED SPIDER-MAN!
HAA! HA! HA! HAAAAA!
THEY SHALL ALL PAY!
WHAT DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD DO? THE GOBLIN IS CRAZY--HE MIGHT DO ANYTHING!
WHATEVER HE DOES, SPIDEY WILL STOP HIM. WE HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT EXPLAINING THE TV TO MOM!


SHORTLY...
IT TOOK ME A WHILE TO LEARN THE SOURCE OF THIS INSULT, BUT THIS IS IT-- PARKER BROTHERS, INC!
PARKER BROTHERS
AND THEY WILL RUE EVER HAVING PUT THEIR NAME ON SUCH A PROJECT!
WHERE IS THE PRESIDENT OF YOUR FIRM?
=GULP!= UH-- MAYBE I-I-I CAN H-HELP YOU!
OUT OF MY WAY! THE GREEN GOBLIN HELPS HIMSELF!
WHA-AT!? THERE'S NO ONE HERE!
H-HE'S AT A CONVENTION, UH, SIR!
PRESIDENT
ALMOST EVERYONE IS THERE. I-IT'S THE BIGGEST TRADE SHOW OF THE SEASON, AT THE GARDEN!
EVEN SPIDER-MAN IS THERE, HELPING TO PROMOTE OUR NEW VIDEO GAME!
SPIDER-MAN!?
WHAT COULD BE MORE FITTING AND PERFECT? SPIDER-MAN IS ABOUT TO DISCOVER THAT CHALLENGING THE GREEN GOBLIN IS NO GAME AT ALL!
PARKER BROTHERS

AT THE EXPO...
THE GOBLIN, A CRIMINAL, OF COURSE GETS NO REMUNERATION FOR THE GAME.
AS FOR ME, I LEARNED A LONG TIME AGO YOU CAN'T CASH CHECKS WITH A MASK ON. SO, MY ROYALTIES WILL GO TO THE CHILDREN'S FUND FOR...
PARKER BROTHERS
GAMES
HOW PREDICTABLY NOBLE--AND PATHETIC!
HAA! HA! HA! HA!
BOOM!
NOW LET'S SEE IF YOU CAN WIN THE REAL GAME!
TWIPP!
WOOOSH!
BOY, IF MY REFLEXES HAD BEEN A FRACTION SLOWER...
SAY, THIS IS A GREAT IDEA FOR A PUBLICITY STUNT...
...WHY WASN'T IT MENTIONED AT THE MEETING YESTERDAY?
I WISH THIS WERE A STUNT! BUT MY SPIDER-SENSE IS NEVER WRONG--YOU'RE THE REAL GREEN GOBLIN!
UNFORTUNATELY FOR YOU!

BLAST! BESIDES MOMENTARILY BLINDING ME, THIS SPARKLE DUST OF GOBBY'S SEEMS TO "FOG" UP MY SPIDER-SENSES!
HA HA HA HA!
WHAM
WHAT'S THE MATTER, WEB-HEAD? DID I LEAVE YOU HANGING?
UHHNN!
WOW! THIS IS GREAT! THOSE FOLKS AT PARKER BROTHERS HAVE REALLY OUTDONE THEMSELVES THIS YEAR!
IT'S INCREDIBLY REALISTIC--WONDER WHO THEY GOT TO PLAY THE GOBLIN?
AH, YOU KNOW--SOME UNEMPLOYED STUNT MAN! SPIDEY PROBABLY RIGGED THE WHOLE THING!
LOOK
BWAANG!
THE PEOPLE BELOW THINK THIS IS A SHOW OF SOME KIND--BUT SOMEONE MIGHT GET HURT BY OUR FIGHT!
I'VE GOT TO ACT FAST!
HA! HA! SEE HOW USELESS YOUR WEBS ARE IN SUCH AN ENCLOSED SPACE! SHALL WE END THIS GAME? HA! HA! HAA!
THAT'S WHAT I LIKE ABOUT YOU, GOBBY--YOU LAUGH AT YOUR OWN JOKES, EVEN WHEN THEY AREN'T FUNNY!
TUNNP!


THAT'S WHY I THINK YOU'LL APPRECIATE MY NEW GAME--
--ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU SEE THE POETRY IN IT!
OH, BY THE WAY--
--THIS IS THE PUNCH LINE!
WHOMP
NOOOOO... UHHH!
Y-YOU MEAN THIS WASN'T A PUBLICITY STUNT? THAT WAS THE REAL GREEN GOBLIN?
I THINK I'LL LEAVE THEM WITH THAT COMFORTING THOUGHT AND EXIT QUIETLY!
WITH MY LUCK, THE GARDEN WILL WANT TO SUE ME FOR DAMAGES!
EXI
SOMETIME LATER...
LOOK WHO DECIDED TO VISIT HIS OLD PALS!
WE'VE GOT A BIG SURPRISE FOR GREENY HERE, DON'T WE, ED?
DROP DEAD!
THAT'S RIGHT! A WHOLE NEW RECREATION FACILITY-- COMPLETE WITH OUR OWN SPIDER-MAN GAME!
NOOOO!
AW, SHADDUP, MY SPIDEY IS WINNIN'!
THE END

antics PRESENTS

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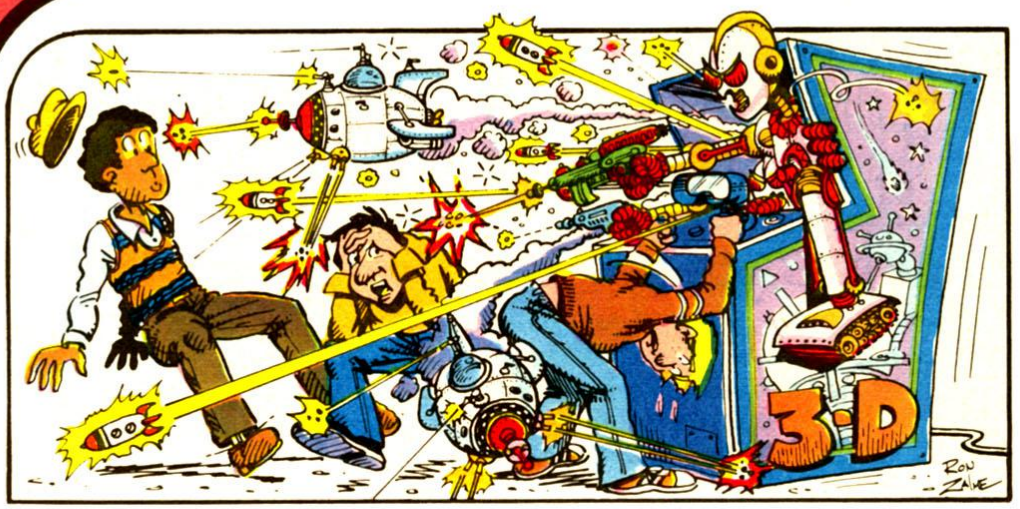


VIDEODISKS AND 3-D

There's a company in Los Angeles called Sega Enterprises, and they're experimenting with games that use videodisks. A videodisk is like a phonograph record, but it holds both sound *and* pictures.

Sega is using movie scenes, instead of computer graphics, on its videodisk games. That means your screen could show you an actual race car, for example, instead of one drawn by a computer.

The movie on the videodisk would show not only your car, but the race track and the cars you're racing against—complete with flesh-and-blood drivers. You'll also see "real" crashes, put together by the movie's special effects crew.

Another product from Sega will add a new dimension to video games—a third dimension, to be exact. Their arcade game SUBROC-3D has you maneuvering a submarine-rocket ship, and the game is done in 3-D.

Instead of wearing special glasses, as you have to do with 3-D movies, for the Sega game you look through a special periscope. Will this new method of looking at a screen win the approval of video game fans? We'll have to wait and see about that.

NO MORE YELLOW PAGES

Let's say you and your friend are going to Elmwood, and you want to check out the arcades there. In order to find out what hours the arcades are open, you need their phone numbers.

So you pop over to the computer console in your kitchen and type in "Video Arcades—Elmwood." In five seconds, your screen shows the name, address, and phone number of every arcade in town.

Does that sound a little bit futuristic? If you lived in France, you might have that machine in your house tomorrow morning—and it wouldn't cost you a dime.

The French phone company is installing microcomputers in millions of French homes. They hope to do away with phone books as quickly as possible. Although the machines are expensive, they'll make it unnecessary for any phone directory ever to be reprinted.

Since the machines are computers, they can also be used for a lot of other services—mail-order shopping, banking, and, of course, games. If the French experiment is successful, our own phone companies may soon be supplying us with free computers—and a new way of playing video games.

STAY-AT-HOME GAMES

The video game arcade business is beginning to show signs of slowing down. Each month, fewer new arcades are opening, and some are going out of business.

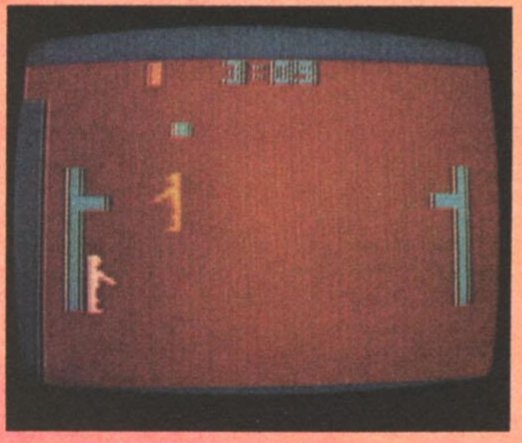
One reason seems to be that all the good locations are already taken. But another is what's been happening with home video games systems.

With each new technological improvement, the home systems come closer and closer to arcade realism. As more people discover the excitement of home systems, video arcades may soon become as dated as pinball parlors and pool halls.

BLIP TIPS!

BASKETBALL

Basketball is a game of precision passing and shooting, tight defending, quick rebounding, and nonstop action. These things make it one of the most difficult of all sports to translate into electronic form without losing a feeling of realism. Three major game manufacturers—Atari, Intellivision, and Odyssey^2—have given it a try. Their efforts have produced mixed results.



ATARI BASKETBALL

Atari's game is one-on-one basketball—two opposing players shooting, blocking, and rebounding. Each game lasts four minutes.

ATARI BASKETBALL can also be a one-player game, with you against the computer. The toughness of the computer's player varies with the score. If you fall behind, the computer gets careless on defense, allowing you to get clear and shoot. But when you take the lead, you're dogged by a demon defender who stays with you every step of the way.

Whether you're playing the computer or a "live" defender, game strategy is the same. On defense, stick to your opponent like wallpaper. Keep trying to get your feet even with his. That's when you're allowed to make a steal.

If he breaks into the open, try to get your body between him and the basket. Then when he shoots, punch the red button. This is how you block a shot.

On offense, the key factor is to be evasive. When you have the ball, dart around the court crazily. The idea is to shake your opponent so you can get open and fire at the basket.

If you're close to mid-court when you shoot, don't hit the red button until the ball is above your head. Closer to the basket, you can hit the button when the ball is about face level.

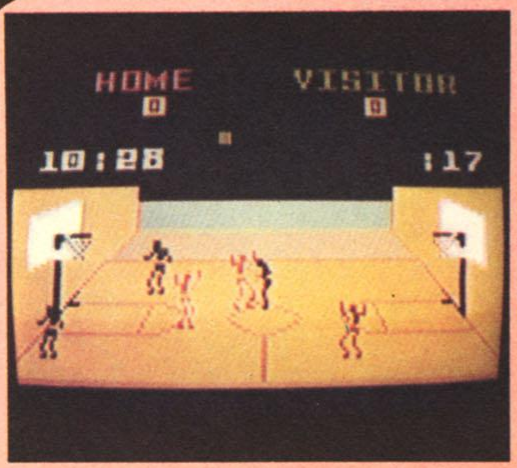
INTELLIVISION NBA BASKETBALL

This cartridge reinforces Intellivision's reputation for superior graphics. It pits two teams of three players against one another. Each player runs, jumps, dribbles, and shoots in realistic fashion. The baskets look like baskets, and the court has a center circle, a mid-court line, and free-throw lanes. You even get cheers and boos from the crowd.

Each game has four quarters of 12 computer "minutes." There's even a countdown clock to enforce the NBA 24-second rule.

You move one of your team's three players with the Intellivision directional disc. The computer controls the other two players.

The overlay on the keypad divides the court into nine different zones. To pass, you press the button for the appropriate zone. The ball leaves the player's hands and will be caught by a teammate, if he's in the right spot. If he isn't, the ball may sail out of bounds or be caught by an opposing player.



As in real life, your success at shooting depends on your distance from the basket. Expect to hit on 90% of your layups, but only on about 5% of your mid-court jump shots.

Defensive skills are very important in this game. You should work at learning to intercept passes. Blocking shots is another defensive skill that can help you win.

While NBA BASKETBALL gets high marks for its visual appeal, it lacks the competitive spirit of the Atari cartridge. At first, you have to look at the keyboard every time you want to pass, block, or shoot, and this slows the pace of the game. If you're going to generate any excitement, you'll have to learn to handle the controls almost by instinct.

ODYSSEY² BASKETBALL

Odyssey², which introduced this game in 1978, was the first company to try a basketball cartridge. Like Atari's game, this one offers a one-on-one, full-court version of basketball. Unlike the Atari game, Odyssey² doesn't allow you to compete against the computer.

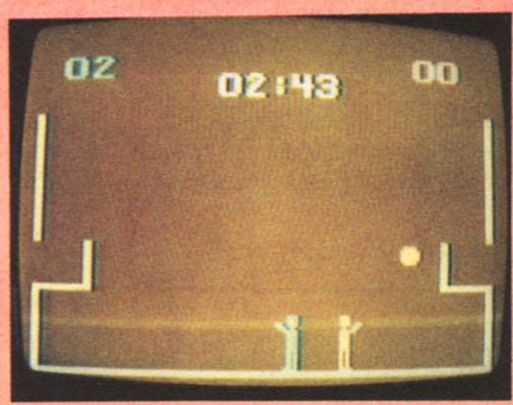
Each game is five minutes long. You use your joystick to move a player around the court, and the action button to take a shot.

The game begins when the ball is dropped from the top of the screen. The first player to touch it has possession.

On defense, you can get possession in two different ways. You can steal the ball by touching it just as your opponent shoots. Or you can hound him and keep him from shooting at all. If he goes more than eight seconds without taking a shot, you get the ball.

Shot-taking in this game is not as realistic as it should be. If you're close to the basket, the ball won't go in because of the steep angle. (Obviously, this game was thought up without the slam-dunk in mind.) If you're too far from the basket, the ball won't reach.

The best strategy is to shoot from just outside the foul circle. Unfortunately,



you'll have to imagine where the foul circle is. It isn't marked on the Odyssey court.

The fallaway jumper is a better tactic. Drive for the basket as if you're about to go for a layup. Then suddenly reverse direction and shoot. This works more consistently than any other shot we tried.

If you're nuts about basketball, but not crazy about any of the cartridges now available, be patient. Atari is about to announce a brand-new basketball cartridge, said to be far superior to the current one. And software manufacturers like Imagic, Activision, and Apollo are bound to be getting into the basketball act soon.

Better days are just ahead.

—George Sullivan

BLIP TIPS II

DONKEY KONG

DONKEY KONG is one of the all-time favorite video arcade attractions. It's a cartoon game with a carpenter named Mario trying to rescue a woman from a gorilla on a unfinished skyscraper.

Your mission in DONKEY KONG is to lead Mario up to where the woman is. The gorilla tries to stop you by firing barrels and other objects from above.

Your main control is a joystick. It's on the left side of the control panel, and you use it to move Mario up, down, to the left or right. The other control is a jump button. Press it and Mario will jump over the barrels or other objects that threaten him.

The key to success in this game is timing. Knowing when to move and when to jump (and when *not* to move or jump) is what separates the good players from the not-so-good.

There are four different boards in DONKEY KONG. As you proceed from one board to the other, the degree of difficulty increases. Here's a rundown of what you can expect:

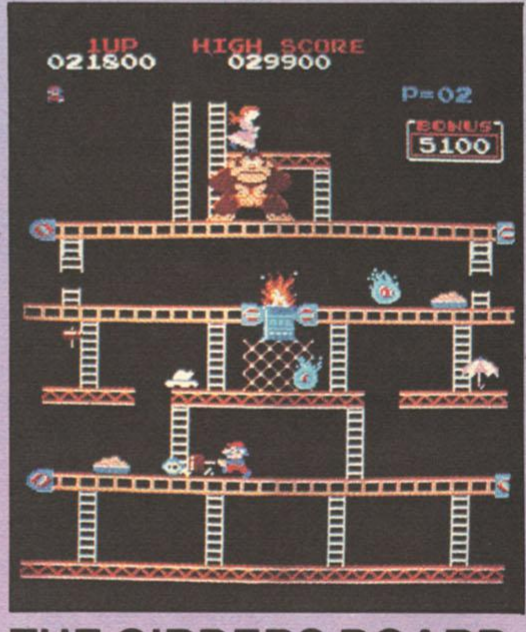
	Board No.	Board Subject
DIFFICULTY LEVEL 1	1	Girders
	2	Rivets
DIFFICULTY LEVEL 2	3	Girders
	4	Elevators
	5	Rivets
DIFFICULTY LEVEL 3	6	Girders
	7	Conveyor Belts
	8	Elevators
	9	Rivets
DIFFICULTY LEVEL 4	10	Girders
	11	Conveyor Belts
	12	Girders
	13	Elevators
	14	Rivets

SCORING

At the first level of difficulty, you begin with a bonus of 5,000 points. It's 6,000 points at the second level, 7,000 at the third, and 8,000 at every level after that.

As you play a board, your bonus points keep dwindling. You have to get Mario to the top of the board before your point total reaches zero. Otherwise, he's as dead as if a barrel had fallen on his head.

You earn points for jumping over a barrel **(100)**, hammering a barrel or fireball **(300 to 800)**, and picking up the woman's hat, handbag, or umbrella **(300 to 500 points)**. You start the game with three Marios, and you get a bonus Mario when you reach a certain point total. Some games are set to give a bonus at 7,000 points, others at 15,000.



THE GIRDERS BOARD

Your screen shows seven red girders, or beams, connected by a series of ladders. (Some people call this the "ladders board.") Mario enters at the lower part of the screen. Kong has already started rolling barrels down in his direction. Concentrate on getting Mario to the top as soon as possible. Whenever possible,

use the center ladders, since they offer the shortest route.

Mario can easily avoid being clobbered by a barrel by jumping over it. Even when the barrels roll toward him two or three at a time, have Mario run toward them. If you make him jump at the right instant, you'll get extra points for a double or triple.

Two hammers are hung at different levels of the building. To pick up a hammer, get Mario directly below it, and press the jump button. He'll come down with the hammer in his hand.

When he's holding a hammer, Mario can't jump or go up or down a ladder. All he can do is pound away at the objects coming after him. Although you earn points for destroying barrels with a hammer, you use up precious seconds doing it. Don't get so involved with smashing barrels that you let your time run out.

THE RIVETS BOARD

The second board you face shows six blue girders connected by ladders. Each of the four middle girders has a large rivet on the left side and one on the right side.

Mario removes the rivet by either jumping or running over it. When he has removed all eight rivets, the building framework collapses. The gorilla plunges headfirst to the ground, and Mario is transported to the top girder beside the woman.

Be careful on this level. Once a rivet has been removed, Mario can fall through the opening. He has to *jump over* the gaps.

You also have fireballs to worry about on this board. As many as five of them can appear at one time. They dance around the girders, threatening to do Mario in.

In dealing with the fireballs, keep in mind that they cannot cross gaps in the girders. Since Mario can (by jumping), it isn't hard for him to elude the fireballs.

THE ELEVATORS BOARD

Expert players say that this is the most difficult board of all. It consists of up-and-down elevators and of ladders that connect different levels. There are also fireballs and bouncing hammers to contend with.

Getting Mario on and off the elevators without sending him to his death is tricky. Suppose you want to cross Mario onto an elevator. Hold the joystick in the direction you want him to move. Then press the jump button.

Remember you can't *walk* Mario onto an elevator. You would be walking him to his death. He has to *jump* to reach the elevator.

THE CONVEYOR BELTS BOARD

On this one, long conveyor belts move to the right and left in the center of the screen. They carry objects that look like pans of sand or mud. (Or they may be freshly baked pies.) Many players say that this is the easiest board of all.

The pans are deadly to Mario. But they're easy to jump over, and they never switch from one level to another. So you can almost relax as you work through this board, and get yourself ready for the next one.

A beginner at DONKEY KONG should be able to complete the first board and earn 3,000 to 4,000 points. After several tries, you're likely to get through the first difficulty level (girders and rivets), which will get you about 10,000 points.

Skilled players often hit scores of 30,000 to 40,000 points at difficulty level three. Experts aren't satisfied with anything less than 100,000.

There's one thing they all have in common, though. Everybody agrees that playing DONKEY KONG is a lot of fun.

—George Sullivan

TRON: MOVIE BOMB, ARCADE SUPERHIT

It was, we were told, a revolution in the art of movie-making. It ranked right up there with the introduction of sound, or color, or even 3-D. It was the first movie animated by a computer.

Tron got enough free publicity before its release to make most of us drool in anticipation. And the publicity worked—for a few days. Millions of people went to see the movie the week it opened.

But after the first few days, ticket sales began to drop—and drop, and drop. By late summer, *Tron* had pulled in only about $30 million. That meant the Disney Corporation stood to lose millions on a movie that was supposed to revolutionize the industry.

What happened? Well, publicity can often fill theaters for a few days after a movie opens. After that, though, word-of-mouth begins to get around. If the word-of-mouth isn't good, the movie is going to die.

And the word-of-mouth about *Tron* was anything but good.

"Beautiful to look at," people said. "Visually exciting. Incredible graphics."

But when you asked what the movie was *about*, you could see the enthusiasm begin to fade. *Tron* may have been a revolutionary movie, but it wasn't *about* much at all.

It had plastic characters and a shoot-em-up story that we've seen hundreds of times—in Westerns, in spy stories, and in space adventures. The Disney people did a slam-bang job on the graphics, but they forgot something very important: most of us expect a movie to tell a story about people we care about.

The sad tale of *Tron*, however, has at least one happy note to it. The movie-makers at Disney may have fallen down on the job. But the publicity people came through in a way that may have long-lasting effects. Not on movies, however, but on video games.

One of the gimmicks they came up with to publicize the movie was an arcade game of the same name. And even if the game TRON isn't exactly revolutionary, it does move screen games a notch or two ahead of where they were before it arrived.

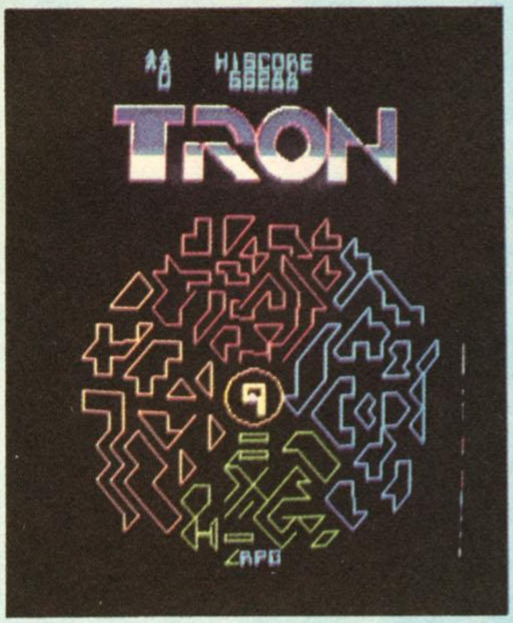
THE GAME

As was true in the movie, TRON involves you in the ultimate video game fantasy. You are Tron, and your mission is to defeat the MCP—the Master Control Program. The intention of the MCP is to control all computer programs and bend them to its will.

Some programs have resisted, in the hope of continuing to serve humanity. They have all fallen before the MCP's onslaught, and now only Tron remains. The MCP is determined to defeat you, and will challenge you with four deadly contests.

If you win, the MCP is defeated, and its plan for world domination is ended. If you lose, there will be no stopping the MCP, for the last champion of freedom will have been destroyed.

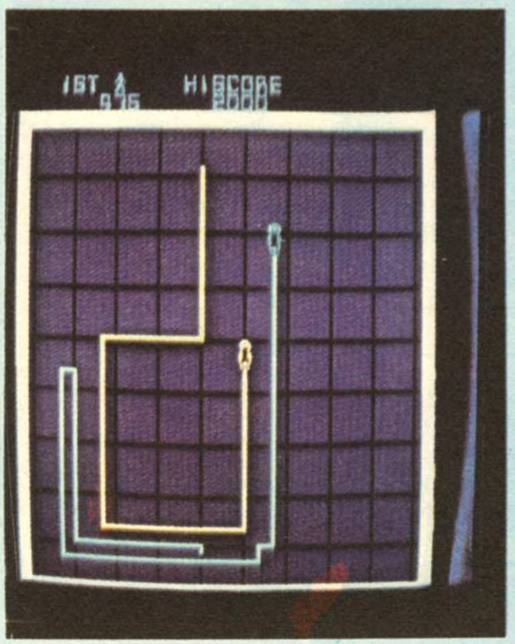
The challenge begins as a four-color maze, in the middle of which Tron appears as a small dot. By moving the dot to the top, bottom, left, or right, you select one of the four areas of combat. Once you enter an arena, Tron appears either



as a finely detailed human figure or as the vehicle in which he will wage combat.

THE MCP CONE is a spinning cylinder of multi-colored light that moves relentlessly down toward Tron. If the cylinder touches him, he is disintegrated.

His defense is to continually fire his power disc at the underside of the cone, destroying pieces of the cone at point of impact. When a large enough opening exists, Tron can move up into the cone, thus defeating the MCP in the first battle.



THE INPUT/OUTPUT TOWER is the connection between the outside world and the world of the Users—human creators of this computer universe. The MCP guards this tower with an army of deadly grid-spiders. Their mission is to prevent Tron from entering the tower and contacting his leaders. Tron has only five seconds to destroy the spiders and enter the tower.

LIGHT CYCLES make up the third challenge from the MCP. Tron pilots his cycle along predetermined lines of a screen-size grid. He has to avoid the MCP's cycle, which is traveling along the same grid.

The light trails left in the wake of the cycles become solid walls, as threatening as the walls of the grid. If Tron can keep riding, within the grid, long enough to force the MCP cycle to crash into a wall or a light trail, the MCP is defeated once again.

THE TANK MAZE puts Tron into another vehicle, a tank facing a similar machine piloted by the MCP. The MCP has a clear advantage in this challenge. Tron needs three direct hits to destroy the MCP tank. But only one blast from the MCP will disintegrate Tron.

And there you have it—four very distinct, and very exciting, challenges making up one game. In addition to that, TRON is graphically one of the most appealing games you'll ever see.

TRON represents a real breakthrough, a giant step ahead in realizing the possibilities of arcade games. Just seeing the game can make you forgive the Disney people for bombing with the movie.

Actually playing it, however, could make you forget that there ever was a movie at all. TRON is one spinoff that completely dwarfs its inspiration.

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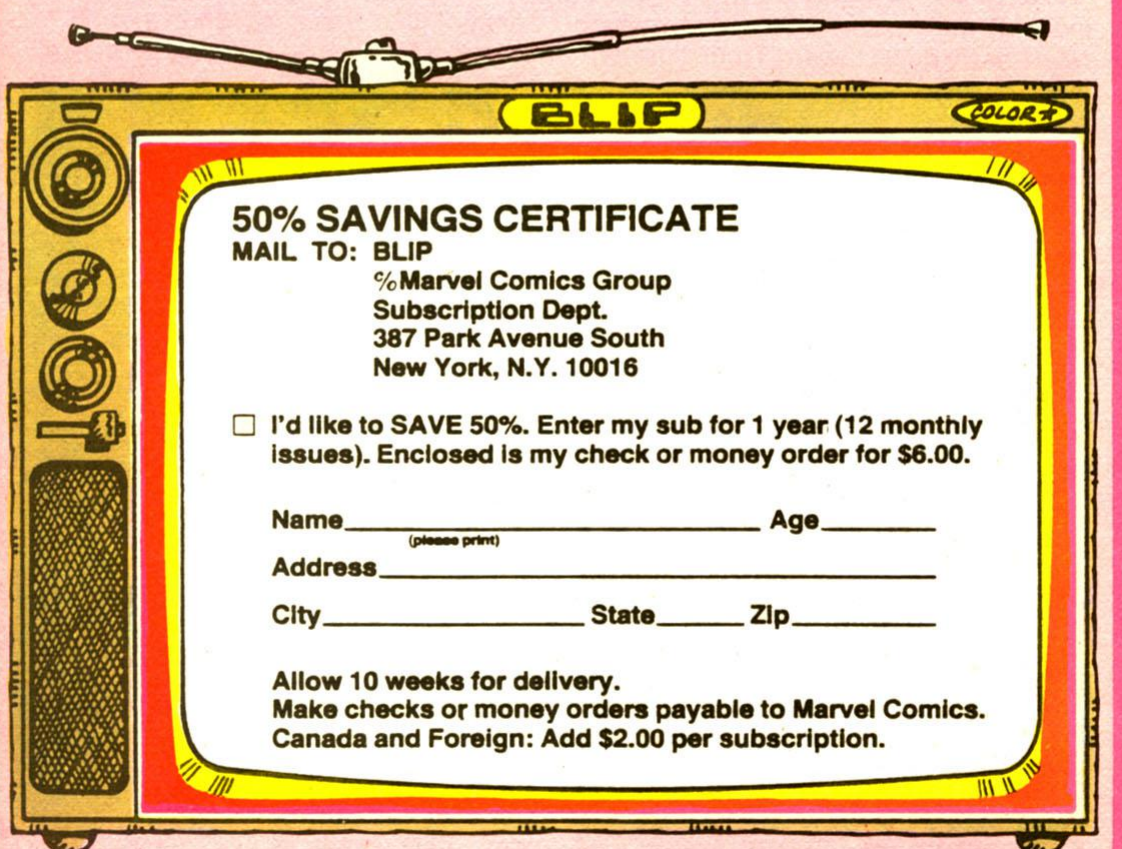

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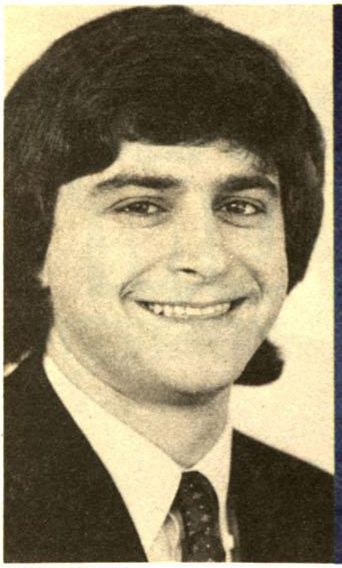

Rob Fulop

One of the DEMON ATTACK screens

DESIGN WIZARD

Rob Fulop is 24 years old. He got his college degree in 1979. He was a computer sciences major, and he recalls being "an average student."

Last year, Rob earned close to $100,000. *Newsweek* magazine referred to him as a "young wizard." In some circles, he's considered a celebrity.

What did the one-time average student do to deserve all this? He created DEMON ATTACK, one of the most popular home video games of 1981. The game is priced at $29.95, and the last time we looked, Imagic had sold well over a million cartridges.

There's one thing we knew for sure before we even talked to Rob. We knew he didn't grow up with a burning desire to design video games. Video games didn't even exist when he was growing up. So BLIP asked him how he got into the field.

He said it happened almost by accident. He was just about to graduate, and he wasn't sure what he should do after college. One day, he saw a notice on the bulletin board at the university career center. It was for a job at Atari.

"Most of my friends wanted to work for IBM or companies like that," Rob told us. "Few of them had ever even heard of Atari."

Atari hired him in the fall of 1979. Not long after, Rob created NIGHT DRIVER, a scary, realistic game in which the player has to guide a car along a dark, fence-lined road. NIGHT DRIVER quickly became one of Atari's most successful games.

In 1980, Rob scored a second big success. At the time, MISSILE COMMAND existed only as an arcade game. Rob adapted it for the Atari home system, and it's still one of their big sellers.

SIMPLE— BUT COMPLEX

Rob left Atari in 1981 to join Imagic,

which began by producing cartridges for the Atari home system. He's now one of their top game designers. We asked him to tell us some of his secrets. What is it that makes certain games take off almost immediately for the top of the best-seller list?

"First of all," Rob told BLIP, "a video game should be simple. You shouldn't need an instruction book to learn how to play a game. You should be able to pick it up quickly on your own.

"At the same time, a game has to be complex. It should gradually reveal itself to you only over a period of weeks. Otherwise, you'll quickly get tired of it."

Not surprisingly, that's a perfect description of DEMON ATTACK. The idea of the game is to destroy waves of birdlike invaders as they sweep down toward your cannon. As in SPACE INVADERS, you use a slide-and-shoot technique to bring down the aliens.

Since slide-and-shoot is a cinch to learn, that's the simple part. But DEMON ATTACK is tough to master. It consists of 84 screens, all of them different. "You can play the game for a couple of months," Rob says, "and still not see every level."

It took Rob between five and six months to design the program for NIGHT DRIVER. He said he usually does about half of his work at home.

"That's where I write the game code," he explained. "I do most of the creative work at home."

At their offices in Los Gatos, California, Imagic has about $200,000 worth of equipment. The material that Rob has written at home is fed into a computer in Los Gatos. That's when he gets to see if what he designed on paper actually works on the screen.

Rob calls NIGHT DRIVER "my best work." He said it required some 2,000 pieces of coded information. We asked for a few lines of this program, so we could publish it along with this article.

Not a chance, Rob told us. Video game programs are classified information. Very highly classified.

CREATIVE TECHNICIANS

While talking with Rob, we wondered, "What are game designers really like?" Are they "computer nerds"? Were they the kind of kids who owned computers at age seven and asked for slide-rules as birthday presents? Did they talk in a strange jargon peppered with terms like *hashing* and *bandwidth*?

Not at all, according to Rob. "They fit no particular pattern," he said. "Sure, some of them majored in computer sciences in college, as I did. But I know at least one designer who barely managed to finish high school. And I know another who was a carpenter before he began designing games."

Rob added, however, that there is one thing all these people of different backgrounds seem to have in common. They have both technical skill and creative talent.

"You don't often meet a creative person who is technical-minded," he said. "And the great majority of technical people aren't creative. When the two are combined, you have a rare person."

Rob mentioned something else that we found fascinating. He said that many people in game designing share a common interest—in music. They're either musicians or avid listeners.

Rob himself plays piano for relaxation. He also enjoys chess, bridge,

(Continued on page 24)

and backgammon, describing himself as a tournament backgammon player.

BREAKING IN

What are the chances of getting into Rob's field? He said it's much more difficult today than it was in the late 1970s. There are thousands of young people capable of designing computer programs today.

But to those who are interested, Rob has this advice: "Be sure you can express yourself in computer language. Be sure you're familiar with the latest games. Then write a game program on your own computer. Bring it to a games company, and tell them it's an example of your work." If it's a good program, they may hire you. They are constantly on the lookout for what has come to be called "entertainment software."

Atari, for example, takes ads in magazines like *Byte* and *Compute*, offering cash and equipment prizes for entertainment programs. Last January, Atari announced its first annual prize of $25,000. It was awarded to Fernando Herrera of New York for his education program MY FIRST ALPHABET.

Rob Fulop predicts that video games will keep getting better and better. "Memory is getting cheaper," he said. "The more memory a chip will hold, the more you can put into a game. You can make a game more realistic and give it more options."

Things are getting better for game designers too. They're getting more money—and more recognition.

Some people predict that video games in the years ahead will be "signed" by their designers, just like jeans or luggage.

Or, for that matter, just like books or magazine articles.

—George Sullivan

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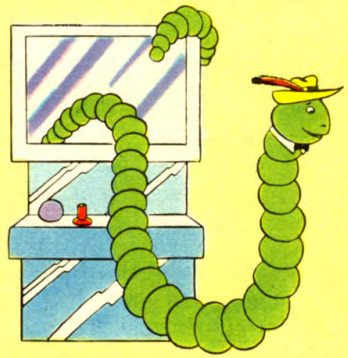


We believe that behind every arcade game, there's at least one secret. Knowing the secret won't make you an expert at the game. But it might improve your score a good deal.

BLIP CONFIDENTIAL is devoted to revealing the secrets that we uncover. Here are some of the ones we've dug up so far.

✸

CENTIPEDE: Try clearing all the mushrooms from the top half of the screen, while creating a solid block of mushrooms in the lower half. This slows the centipede down, giving you more time to zap it. It also prevents the flea from attacking you. (The flea drops down only when the lower half is free of mushrooms.)

✸

FRENZY: The maze walls have different characteristics. White walls are very hazardous. Any shot that hits a white wall rebounds right back. Never take more shots than you have to at a robot standing in front of a white wall. One shot might wipe out the robot, and the next might bounce back and nail you.

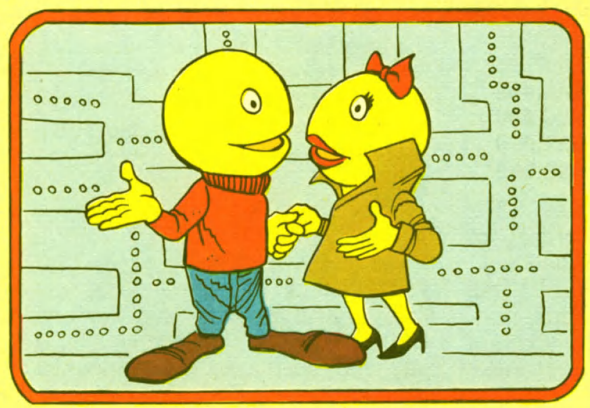
✸

MS PAC-MAN: The blue board is the toughest to complete. That's because two of its four tunnels are in the top row, and passage to them can be obstructed. Play defensively when you're in the upper part of the board. Always try to keep a path clear to one of the energizers or tunnel entrances.

FROGGER: The toughest dock to fill is the one at the far left of the screen. Since objects keep moving faster, the longer a screen continues, the harder that dock is to fill. *Solution:* Always maneuver your first frog into that slot.

✸

QIX: There are several ways to trap the Qix. One of the easiest is to start at the bottom of the screen and build a T-shaped design. Then bottle up the Qix in one of the two inside corners of the T.



✸

MOUSETRAP: Be sure to keep an open passage to the box marked IN, which is at the center of the board. The IN box is your only defense against the hawk. Once you get into the box, you're sent to one of the four corners of the board. This confuses the hawk and gives you time to map your escape.

✸

TEMPEST: At level 11, the dreaded fuseballs appear for the first time. Move away from the fuseball, clearing an escape route as you go. Fuseballs are slow-moving creatures and you can easily warp to the next level before the fuseball makes contact with you.

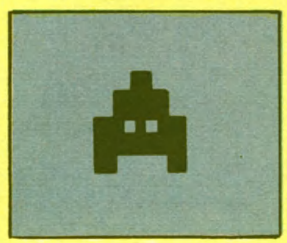
ROBOTRON: The most dangerous enemies are the flame-haired brain robots. They appear in round five and in every fifth round after that. They not only seek out and destroy your homing missiles, they also have the power to turn your clones into deadly enemies. Try to save as many humanoids as possible. That's the only way to keep the brains from turning them against you.

✸

TURBO: Keep to the middle of the road. This gives you the best chance of avoiding obstructions on the right and left sides of the roadway. It's true that high speed and ability to lap cars build your score. But don't be afraid to ease up on the gas pedal at times. You'll find yourself having fewer collisions.

✸

ZAXXON: You face a showdown with the Zaxxon robot on every even-numbered wave. To survive, you must shoot the robot in the left armpit exactly six times. So start firing the moment the robot appears.



HALL OF FAME

If you read our first issue last month, you know about Walt Day. He's the director of the Twin Galaxies International Scoreboard in Ottuma, Iowa. You can call Walt if you want to know the national record score for any arcade game.

If you want to try breaking a record, Walt says there are four games in which scores seem to be easily beatable. Because they're easy, a lot of experienced players stay away from them. Here are the four games and their current records:

BOSCONIAN	**442,400**
WILD WESTERN	**405,400**
GALAGA	**7,857,090**
RED BARON	**99,990**

Setting an arcade record is no cinch. The competition is fierce. In the time it takes you to read this sentence, a couple of hundred people have probably pumped quarters or tokens into GALAGA or RED BARON.

Walt thinks the PAC-MAN record is bound to be surpassed soon. When we went to press, the high score for PAC-MAN was 5,971,440 points. That record was set by Ken French at the Space Station 7 Arcade in Highland, California.

"But today's players," Walt says, "are capable of scoring 11 or 12 million points in PAC-MAN. It won't be long before someone does."

Players who achieve record scores, or even come close, report that the machines act a bit freaky when the numbers start getting very big. PAC-MAN itself has been known to do this.

If you're a skilled PAC-MAN player, able to rack up scores of 70,000 to 80,000, you've probably gone as far as the 12th or 13th screen. If so, you know that the symbol for the 12th board is a bell, and for the 13th a key. As you go on, the number of keys increases.

If you've ever gone as far as the first key, you can appreciate what 17-year-old Steve Sanders of Clinton, Missouri, did recently. Steve reached the 243rd key!

At that point, Steve's machine began acting crazy. A vertical line split the screen down the middle. The image stayed on the left side of the line,but on the right side it was replaced by a test pattern. It was as if

the manufacturer was telling Steve, "You've gone far enough, buddy."

Steve managed to get through the 243rd screen. On the 244th, the symbol was a *broken* key. He got wiped out on that screen.

Steve also found out that MS PAC-MAN acts in the same strange manner as her mate. The screen divides in two on the 137th board. If you make your way through that board, the screen goes blank.

All this, of course, is the game manufacturer's way of putting a stop to marathon performances. Long-range accomplishments don't put any money in an arcade owner's pocket.

In case you're wondering, these crazy antics don't happen every time. When Ken French blazed to his record score in PAC-MAN, the split screen never appeared.

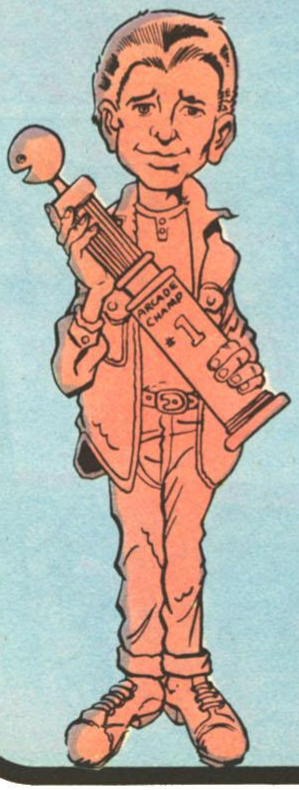
Sometimes bizarre machine behavior can benefit the player. In some TEMPEST games, for example, when you hit 630,000 points, you're handed *forty* free games. You can bet the manufacturer is trying to track down any TEMPEST machines with this shortcoming.

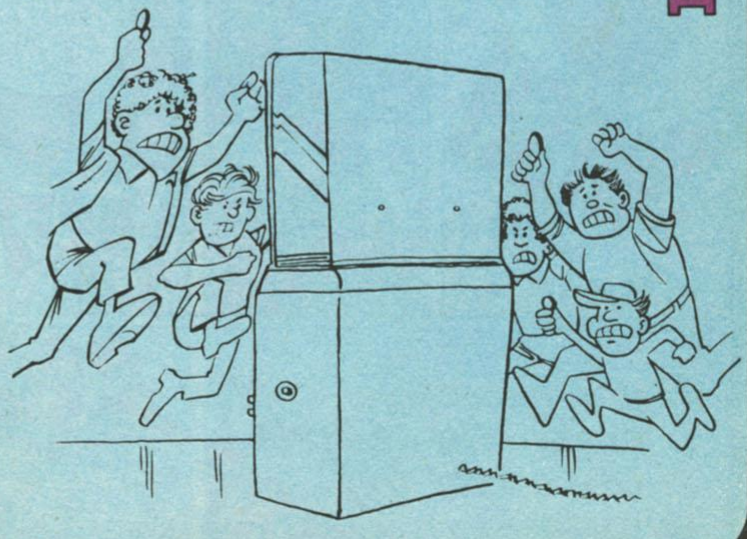
Mike Arruda and his colleagues at the Starcastle Arcade in Smithfield, Rhode Island, have learned that GALAGA machines can register higher scores when the user takes the "Player Two" position. In fact, Mike has seen scores of up to 9,999,990 recorded for the second player.

As time goes on, more and more players become more and more skilled. That's likely to lead manufacturers to program more of their machines to act erratically.

For instance, marathoners are now reporting that some GALAGA machines simply quit at the 256th screen. The words STAGE ZERO appear on the screen, and then everything fades to black.

If you run into any of this weird behavior, Walt Day would like to hear about it. You can write to him at P.O. Box 691, Ottuma, Iowa 53501, or call him at (515) 584-6421.





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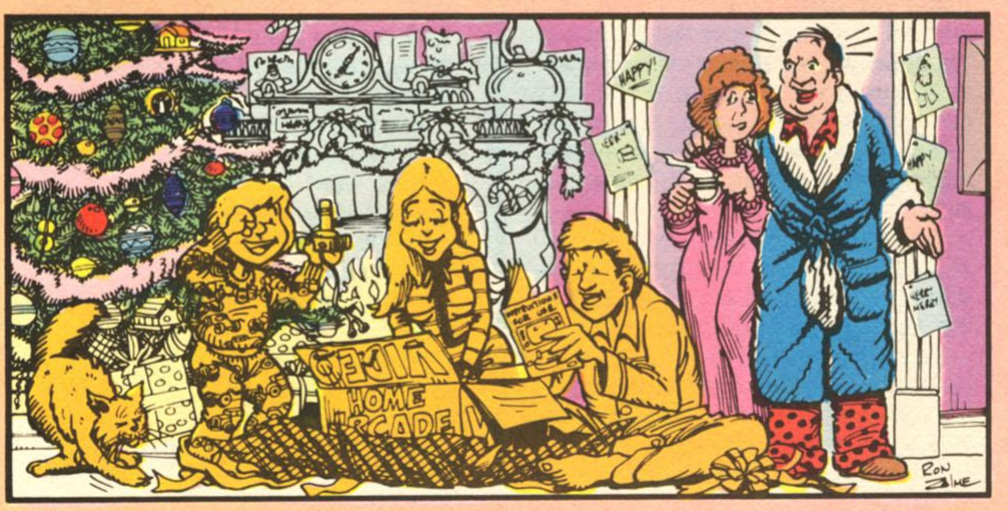


A short story by Robert Harras

Scott Cooper sat up in bed, cramming for the next morning's geometry test. His parents' voices drifted up from downstairs, but he wasn't listening.

Down in the living room, Mr. Cooper put his paper down and stared incredulously at his wife. "Socks?!" he sputtered. "Sweater and scarves?! Kids don't want that sort of thing for Christmas! I was figuring on getting them video games this year."

"Video games?" Mrs. Cooper said. "I don't know, dear. You know how easy it is for young minds to become addicted to things like that. Why not get something we can all enjoy? Something tried and true—like parcheesi?"

"*Parcheesi*?! What can they learn from parcheesi? This is the age of the computer, honey. The kids can learn things from video games—like eye-hand coordination. And you know how little Calvin could use some of that!"

"Yes," she mused. "He does have a habit of missing his mouth when he eats." She thought for a moment, then added, "Well, I guess it's all right if it will help them. . . ."

On Christmas morning, Scott, Calvin, and their sister Cindy tore open the large box under the tree. They were delighted at what they found inside.

"Terrific!" Scott said, laughing. "I get to atomize Krytolians in my own living room!"

"Can I help you set it up, Dad?" Cindy asked.

"I want to blast radioactive slugs," Calvin said.

"Now, now Calvin," Mrs. Cooper said, "this is for eye-hand coordination. It will teach you where your mouth is."

Calvin gave her a puzzled look. "That's right," his father announced. "This *is* a toy, of course. But it's also an educational tool. We're living in a world whose future is linked to the—"

"We know, dear," Mrs. Cooper interrupted. "But shouldn't the children open their other gifts?"

"Oh," Mr. Cooper said. "Of course. There *are* other gifts, aren't there?"

After the other gifts were opened, the children joined their father, who was busily hooking up the video game console to the TV set. As he worked, he talked constantly about the educational value of video games in this technological age. Scott and Cindy nodded every once in a while.

Calvin tugged at his father's robe and asked, "When can I blast a slug?"

An hour later, the kids had all had at least one turn at the games. Their father had watched and marveled at the new toy he'd bought for them.

"Look at those graphics!" he proclaimed. "I tell you, computer artistry has made some amazing advances in the past few years!"

"Hit the action button, Cindy! That's it! You've got him!"

"Move your joystick to the left, Calvin! No, to the *left*!"

It wasn't long before Mr. Cooper lost interest in watching. He felt he just had to demonstrate to his children how to master these games.

"No, no, Scott, not that way. Here, let me show you."

In no time at all, he was howling with delight as he shot down one alien invader after another. "Did you see that, hon? That's 350,000 points, and it's only my third try!"

"That's very nice, dear," Mrs. Cooper said, gathering the discarded wrapping paper from the floor. "But shouldn't you let the children try again? You've been playing for two hours now. That isn't helping Calvin's eye-hand coordination, you know."

"I want to blast some slugs," Calvin said.

"Have I been playing that long?" Mr. Cooper asked. "Here, kids. Take the controls. You're going to love it!"

Looking back on it, long afterward, Scott realized that that was the last time his father ever gave up the joystick voluntarily. The kids were interested in the games, but their interest was nowhere near the devotion shown by their father.

Oh, they liked the games well enough. They'd come home after school and argue over who was going to play first. Some mornings, their mother would have to tear them away from the set to get them off to school.

But they all had other things to do, and their interest weakened as the weeks went by. The opposite was true for Mr. Cooper.

In the old days, he'd watch the evening news right after dinner. He was very big on being "an informed citizen." Now, he couldn't get away from the table fast enough. But it wasn't to keep informed; it was to repel alien invaders.

Scott and Cindy began taking over his household duties. They helped with the dishes and took out the garbage, while their father chased dragons. While Mr. Cooper fought World War I air battles, Calvin learned to eat without missing his mouth. Sometimes Mrs. Cooper had to dust around her husband, hoping the dust would make him sneeze the way it did in the old days. But he was usually too intent on the screen to sneeze.

One evening, Scott was browsing through the newspaper—something his father used to do. He came across an article written by a psychologist. It predicted that today's generation of children were doomed to grow into "glassy-eyed psychopathic loners incapable of social interaction on even the most primary level." The cause of this horrible fate? Addiction to video games.

Scott was shaken up by the article. Of course, his father was no child—or was he? His mother was always saying, "Your father will never grow up."

But his father didn't seem psychopathic. Well, sometimes, he might rant like a madman when the Krytolians defeated him. Did that qualify as psychopathic? Scott began to wonder about that.

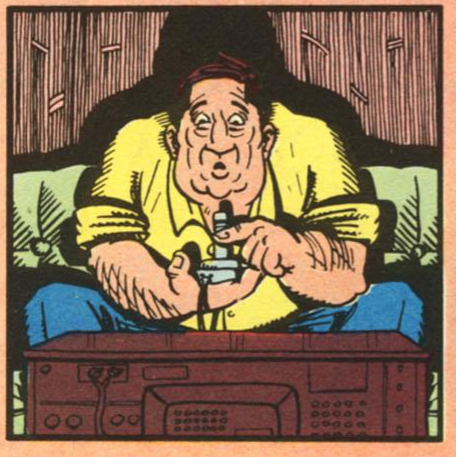
One thing *was* clear, though. His father was becoming more and more glassy-eyed. Sometimes he'd look right at you and seem to be several planets away.

Scott talked to Cindy about it. Calvin sat on the couch and listened.

"I've noticed it too," Cindy said. "I can't believe this is happening to him."

"I kind of miss him, if you know what I mean," Scott said.

"Me too," Cindy said. "I used to hate listening to his speeches about responsibility and the future and things like that. Now I'd give anything for one little peep about the techno-



logical implications of the space shuttle."

"You know what I think?" Calvin said. "I think he's been taken over by the people in the TV set."

Scott dismissed that as ridiculous. (Everything your younger brother says sounds ridiculous.) But he had second thoughts when he looked in on his father.

There sat Mr. Cooper, his face eerily reflecting the blue-gray radiation of the TV screen, his eyes staring into a sea of blips and dots.

It was time for action, Scott decided. It was time to save his father.

"Dad?" he called. No response. That was hardly surprising, since lately it took five or six good yells to get his father's attention.

Scott took a deep breath and bellowed, "DAD!" His father blinked. "IT'S REALITY TIME!"

His father blinked again, but his eyes didn't stray from the screen. "Yes, Scott. What is it?"

Mr. Cooper pressed the fire button, and a World War I biplane bit the dust.

"I was thinking, Dad," Scott said, as Cindy and Calvin stepped up behind him. "That present you bought us for Christmas. We really loved it. But we were wondering if you'd consider something different the next time around."

"Like what?" his father asked, jerking the joystick from right to left.

"Oh, I don't know," Scott said. "Something simple . . . like parcheesi, maybe."

Mr. Cooper blinked and turned his head from the screen. He stared at each of his children in turn, then put the joystick down.

"Parcheesi," he said, as though talking in his sleep. "I've heard of that before . . . long ago, it seems. Actually, I was thinking of getting an expansion module for the system here. More games. More fun, and, of course, more educational."

"We'd rather not, Dad," Cindy said. "I think we'd prefer parcheesi."

Mr. Cooper sat there, bewildered. His wife walked into the room just as he was turning off the TV set.

He turned back to his children with a small smile. "We have here the best that technology can offer," he said. "And my children want a game of parcheesi."

He looked up at his wife, who was smiling broadly. "I guess I shouldn't worry too much," he said. "Until they start asking for socks and scarves.

VIDEO WORD SEARCH

We've hidden the names of 25 arcade games in the grid below. The names read from the left or right, from the top or bottom, or on a diagonal. See if you can find all 25 names. If you need help, you'll find the complete list, upside-down, at the bottom of the page. See next month's issue of BLIP for the solution.

A R N A M K C I K F R E N Z Y
T M U B U T M N A M C A P S M
L S I A S R E T N G P I N S A
R Q E S T O D S G M A F J T K
E A H P S N L L A H R L G A E
N Q W I M I E G R C T O A R T
O J M B T E L C O Y E K Z G R
Z V O H P X T E O F S A F A A
E D E P I T N E C R U R T T X
L R E D N E F E D O O U B E G
T Q K T F L D N Q G M Z Y S U
T E R U T N E V G I R M V K D
A P C R D G E E N O X X A Z G
B R O B O T R O N X C J W N I
E F H O I G N O K Y E K N O D

BATTLEZONE
CENTAUR
CENTIPEDE
DEFENDER
DIG DUG
DONKEY KONG
FRENZY
FROGGER
GALAGA
GORF
KANGAROO
KICKMAN
MAKE TRAX
MISSILE COMMAND
MOUSETRAP
MS PACMAN
QIX
ROBOTRON
SLITHER
STARGATE
TEMPEST
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TURBO
VENTURE
ZAXXON

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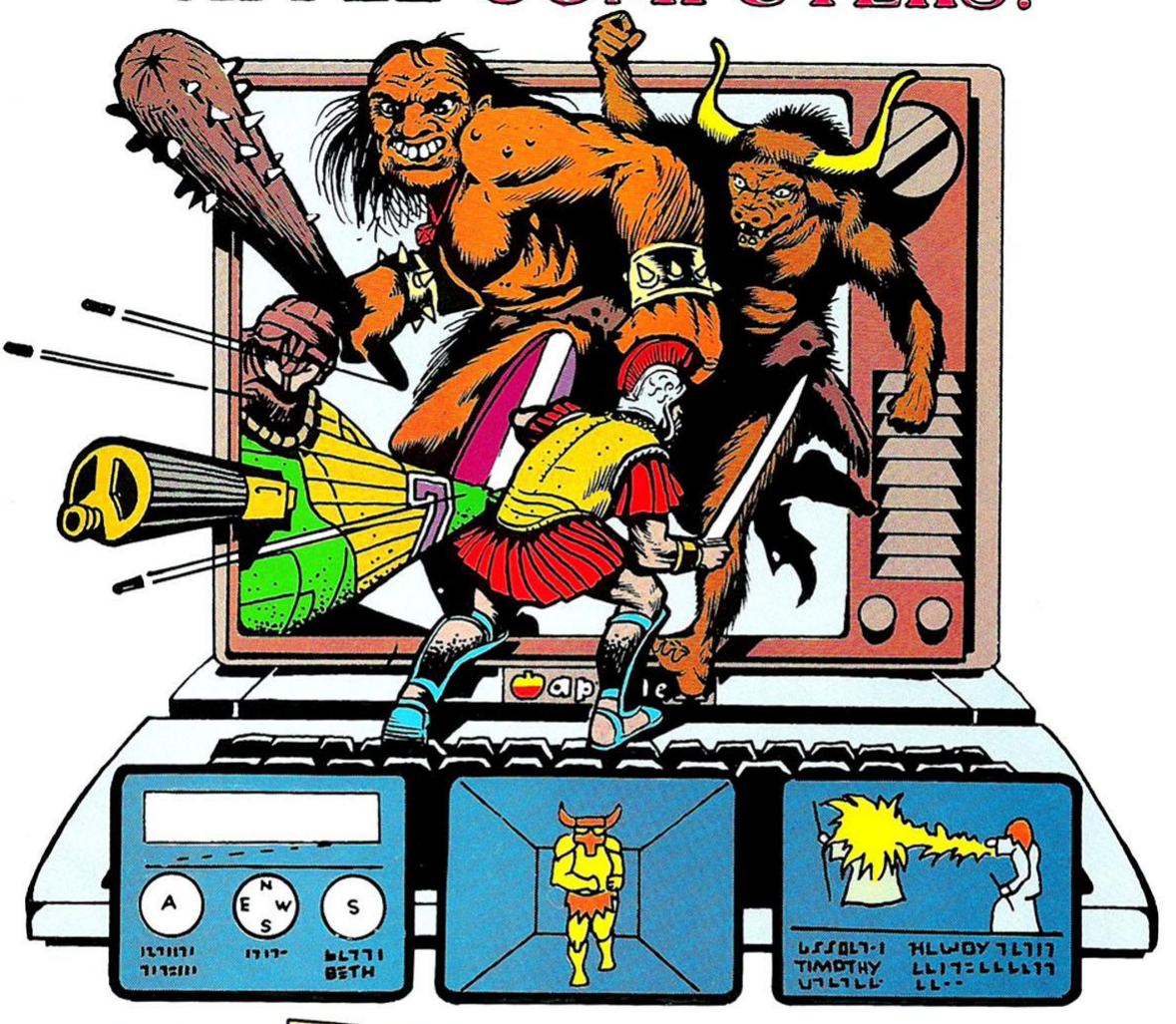

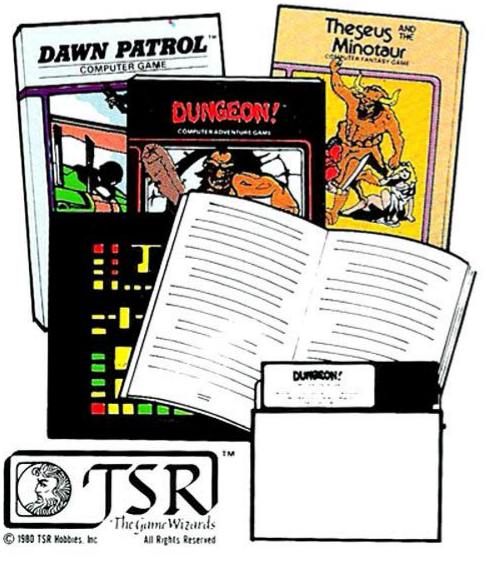

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